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## The American Institute of Sacred Literature

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### A PROFESSIONAL READING COURSE ON THE EFFICIENT CHURCH

*The church has always been mindful of the social life of the community in which it has been placed. Throughout the Middle Ages the church cared for the poor, protected literature, furnished great statesmen and even in some measure provided amusement for the people. With the rise of Puritanism, it is true, the idea of the church changed and it became more like the synagogue of the older days, a place of instruction and formal worship. But whatever may have been its relation to social activity the church is in constant need of growing more sensitive to the particular needs of a period or a locality. Thus we are led to some of the peculiar and characteristic problems of our own day.*

*The Professional Reading Guild course, of which this is the third study, is being conducted by PROFESSOR SHAILER MATHEWS, Dean of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. Questions for consideration should be addressed to the Editors of the BIBLICAL WORLD; inquiries concerning books and traveling libraries to the AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE.*

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A few years ago there swept over the educational world a new social enthusiasm: chairs of sociology were established; political economy ceased to be a dismal science; university settlements sprang up in many cities; and a new devotion to social service seized hundreds of the choicest undergraduate students. This renaissance in social interest was not an accident. Ever since the philosophical movements of the eighteenth century there has been developing in Europe and America a recognition of society as something more than a mere aggregation of individuals. Little by little this conception worked itself into great parties like the Social Democratic party in Germany, the Socialists in Russia and other countries. But sociology is a very different thing from Socialism and interest in sociological problems does not necessarily commit a person to any particular theory.

Such a widespread interest in social problems and particularly in the abuse of our industrial order reflected itself at the start somewhat slowly in church activity. In the very nature of the case religious bodies are conservative and it was but natural that institutions accus-

tomed to different methods of procedure should have looked with caution and suspicion on movements which in many cases were opposed to religion itself. But gradually this attitude of suspicion has been disappearing, especially in great cities, and the church is awakening to a sense of its obligation to the needs of the community and many clergymen have openly heralded the social gospel which, while not less religious than that of the former days, is more aflame with the desire to right social wrongs and to establish a larger degree of equality and fraternity.

The literature which this new interest developed has at the present time become voluminous. It is hard to realize that twenty years ago there were not more than a half a dozen books of any serious importance dealing with the matter. Fifteen years ago it was difficult to find sane and balanced literature dealing with the social obligations of the church. Today it is difficult to select books from a literature which includes in itself some of the most effective religious writing of recent years.

For those who have not shared to the full in this new spirit no first volume could be better than that by Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*. It is not a scientific treatise—indeed it could hardly be called a treatise. It is rather the essence of the experience of a woman of sympathies, balance, judgment, and keen observation. It will not teach the reader principles of sociology, but it will bring home as will almost no other volume the dangers with which our modern civilization surrounds our young people. It is a mistake to think that the dangers are limited to large cities. The spread of the moving-picture show, the breakdown of parental authority, and the desire for entertainment threaten the morals of boys and girls in the small town as truly as in great cities. As Miss Addams says, "Never before in civilization have such numbers of young girls been suddenly released from the protection of the home and permitted to walk unattended upon city streets and to work under alien roofs."

In this volume Miss Addams describes at some length the condition of young women in a large city, but the volume by no means excludes young men. Doubtless because of her experience she feels more deeply the social problem set by the industrialization of women, but the volume but seldom touches upon anything connected even remotely with the social evil. The great plea of Miss Addams is that youth is full of vigor, the spirit of adventure, and the desire for play; that it is advisable and even necessary to provide for means by which such desires can be helpfully satisfied. To this end she approves of the city's maintaining

well-regulated public dance-halls and clubrooms. So long as the boys and girls are on the street there is almost inevitable likelihood that they will sooner or later appear in the juvenile court. Miss Addams has no eccentric conception of what the demands of youth are nor does she emphasize the non-moral element of youthfulness so as to overlook the ideals which are always present in young lives. Particularly is this true in the chapter on the "Thirst for Righteousness," where first-hand knowledge of the new class of immigrants has led her to recognize in them a democratic idealism which the more conservative citizens of the United States do not recognize. To some readers the illustrations she gives of this new spirit will seem exaggerated, but it is not to be forgotten that the youth of continental Europe are far more temperamental than the youth of the Anglo-Saxon world. Miss Addams pleads most earnestly that our civilization shall not permit this idealism to be lost, but that all our religious instruction and institutions shall seize upon it as one element by which life can be reconstructed for the better. "We may either smother the divine fire of youth or we may feed it. We may either stand stupidly staring as it sinks into a murky fire of crime and flares into intermittent blaze of folly or we may tend it into a lambent flame with power to make clean and bright our dingy city streets." Such alternatives constitute an unmistakable call to the churches.

The pamphlet of Professor Charles Henderson, *A Reasonable Social Policy for Christian People*, is one of the sanest and at the same time most comprehensive presentations of the subject in print. Professor Henderson writes both with the knowledge of a scientific sociologist and at the same time with an altogether exceptional experience born of a long pastorate and of service as an expert in industrial reform. At the present time he is one of the members of the International Prison Commission of the United States and is prominent in a number of societies dealing with social reform. He has been repeatedly summoned by state and city governments to give assistance in dealing with the pressing problems of poverty and labor. His essay, therefore, is one which will well serve as an introduction to the entire problem of the relation of the church to society. If Miss Addams' book arouses interest in the problem, Professor Henderson's proposals block out a program which one might reasonably expect to find practicable.

One of the most notable awakenings of recent years is that of the interest in the country. For years the farmer seemed to live outside the region of anything one might reckon of public interest. Men left

the farm almost as they would flee a city with the plague. All this, however, is rapidly changing and the anxiety which we formerly felt regarding the cities is now paralleled by the anxiety concerning the rural districts. Fortunately in America it is only necessary to state the problem to have many volunteers undertake to solve it. Chief among the forces making toward the betterment of rural life are the agricultural schools. They are not merely teaching the farmer how to raise better crops and cattle, but they are showing him how to develop a better social life with many of the enjoyments of the city even in the scattered farming districts. A pioneer among the writers on this important subject is Kenyon L. Butterfield, president of the Massachusetts Agricultural College and a member of President Roosevelt's famous Commission on Country Life. In his little volume, *The Country Church and the Rural Problem*, he organizes his material in an effective and illuminating fashion. The volume is composed of a series of lectures given at the Hartford Theological Seminary in 1909, but not published till two years later. It is therefore fully in touch with developments of recent months. In his first chapter President Butterfield formulates the rural problem as follows: "The rural problem is to maintain upon our land a class of people whose status in our society fairly represents American ideals—industrial, political, social, and ethical." In proceeding to the solution of this problem he faces first of all the comparative isolation of the farmer's life. This he would offset, not by moving the farmer's house into little villages, but by developing the means of communication between separate farms, by providing means of recreation for the young, by enriching woman's life by various associations, and by the development of the neighborhood spirit. Ultimately such a policy rests upon education and President Butterfield is thus led naturally to a discussion of what the farmer's education should be in the school, the agricultural college, and the grange or some similar organization. In this process of education and the leadership which it involves the church is of the first importance. Its task is to maintain and enlarge the ideals of a community by the use of the religious motive and then help the farmers to embody these ideals in all their social relationships. Very properly does President Butterfield emphasize the need of these ideals. Anyone familiar with agricultural life knows the disposition of the farmers to take materialistic views of life. The church can meet this need as no other institution.

Such a position of the church demands a well-trained and able type of minister and to this considerable attention is given in this volume.

President Butterfield thinks that such a minister should have some training in an agricultural school in order that he may be able to help his parishioners into larger economic efficiency. There is much to be said in favor of such a view, but there is one fundamental need—that the rural pastorate be regarded as a fit career for the brightest young men in our seminaries. In passing it may be remarked that our seminaries are increasingly recognizing the need for courses in rural communities and remodeling their courses accordingly. And they are very properly insisting that, no matter how skilled a country minister may become in raising crops, he must be even more skilled in raising character. After all has been said, the real efficiency of a church must be sought in the spiritual rather than the sociological and economic sphere.

The rural problem is still further discussed more elaborately and in detail by Warren H. Wilson in *The Church of the Open Country*. Doctor Wilson is the superintendent of the Department of the Church and Country Life of the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church of the United States. His volume accordingly is based upon a very wide acquaintance with rural conditions and at the same time is intended to set forth specifically what service the church can render to the country. His treatment, however, is by no means limited to ecclesiastical matters but includes a careful sociological study of country life as it is now lived, the changing conditions which are affecting this life, the country school both as it ought not to be and as it should be, and a very suggestive chapter on rural morality and recreation. On each one of these various topics the church naturally may and should have a direct bearing. The second half of the book deals more directly with the duties of the rural church. Dr. Wilson's discussion is alive with social sympathy and abounds with sensible advice as to nearly everything financial, from the cost of a minister's child to an estimate as to the amount a minister may expect for marriage fees. The most important of his chapters, however, undoubtedly is that upon the church leadership of the community. Herein he gives a number of very pertinent suggestions as to the problem which the title suggests.

Throughout the book there is underlying a keen perception of the possibility of the church in the community. While the book is somewhat overanalyzed and fragmentary, it is thoroughly stimulating and is to be most heartily commended for all those who are interested in this enormously important matter. We could wish that every country pastor in the land might have a copy to arouse his enthusiasm for larger social and effectively religious activity.

Theoretical discussions of the significance of the church are numerous and in many cases very helpful, but it would be difficult to find a more elaborate presentation of how a church is to undertake definite social service than that contained in the volume by Hodges and Reichert, *The Administration of an Institutional Church*. The volume is an elaborate account of the method worked out by Doctor Rainsford and his clergymen in St. George's Parish. It seems as if nothing was overlooked in the volume. There are plans for parish houses, church deaconess' houses, seaside cottages for the poor of the parish. There are schedules of services, cards of invitation, lists of hymns, record blanks of Christian work, and innumerable forms making for efficiency. Methods of financing the church are told in detail as well as methods of work in the various organizations connected with the church. It would, of course, hardly be possible for all churches to put into operation the entire method adopted in St. George's, but the volume abounds in suggestions. There is probably no parish in America which has developed institutional efficiency to such a high degree as has St. George's. Such activities as are here portrayed obviously do not deal at once with the great social movements, but they do set forth a distinct ideal which any church may with proper adaptations adopt.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the chief needs of the young people of your community?
2. To what extent are the various churches of your community providing opportunity of normal recreation and social life for those who lack such opportunity?
3. Would you favor the use of moving pictures in the church?
4. Is it the business of the country church to induce people to stay on the farms?
5. How much and what use can be made of the church building as a social center of a rural community?
6. How far can the rural church co-operate with the grange?
7. What can a church do to counteract the influence of neighboring saloons?
8. If there came a moral issue in a community, would it be advisable for the church as such to enter into politics?

Other volumes dealing with the general subject are: Henderson, *Social Duties from the Christian Point of View*; Mathews, *The Church and the Changing Order*; Hodges, *Faith and Social Service*; Peabody, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*. On the church and rural life: Ashenhurst, *The Day of the Country Church*; Bailey, *The Country Life Movement*; Hayward, *Institutional Work for the Country Church*; Carver, *Principles of Rural Economics*.